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San Jose General Plan 4-Year Review Task Force  
City of San Jose  
200 E. Santa Clara St.  
San Jose, CA, 95113  
*via email*

Re: Coyote Valley Urban Reserve

Dear Co-chairs Alvarado and Pandori and Task Force Members,

This letter is in response to the letter dated July 21, 2020, from Alice Kaufman, Legislative Advocacy Director of Green Foothills, and ten others advocating elimination of the “Urban Reserve” designation for Mid Coyote Valley and zoning the entire valley Agriculture or Open Space. I strongly support the goals expressed in the letter – protection of the environment, nature, and open space, and alliance with nature in the face of climate change. However, the authors do not seem to have considered important facts that suggest that without appropriate planning their proposals could, in fact, be drivers of suburban sprawl and resulting climate destruction.

Therefore, I oppose the proposed elimination of the Urban Reserve and associated zoning changes, at least for now.

Coyote Valley and the adjacent former Pratt & Whitney site total 14.4 square miles. That makes them almost one third the size of the city of San Francisco. Caltrain takes about 34 minutes from Coyote Valley to downtown San Jose on a line where modern electrification capable of producing dramatically faster speeds is already under way.

Meanwhile, San Jose and Silicon Valley generally are completely failing to meet the basic needs of a huge portion of their people. California and especially the Bay area have the highest homelessness and poverty rates in the U.S., driven by dysfunctional housing regulation. In the midst of its housing crisis, Greater San Jose is producing less than one fourth as much housing as Greater Seattle. Entry level housing often costs double the prices in Seattle and Denver, and we lack a strategy for overcoming the problem.

It is thus premature to remove the Urban Reserve designation from Mid Coyote Valley. The failure of San Jose, Santa Clara County, and the Bay area to address their people’s housing needs is already driving a dramatic increase in urban sprawl. I could not find good statistics, but a quick drive around Salinas and Los Baños will show those forced out of Santa Clara County are sprawling elsewhere. Clearly many are already driving the length of Coyote Valley every day from far off homes because San Jose prevents them from living here.

The amount of land needed for housing is not great. If we work with recent estimates by SPUR and others of the housing need, we can estimate that Santa Clara County needs homes for a million more people in the medium term. Assuming three people per home and a moderate density of 35 units per acre, we only need to develop or redevelop about 1.2% of the county to end the intense pressure for sprawl that current lack of policy creates.

However, as the mere 6,500 units of housing permitted in greater San Jose last year shows, we are nowhere close to planning for the number of people who will want to live here. Some of those who can't get housing wind up homeless. Some move to states like Arizona and Texas. But inevitably some wind up sprawling across the Central and Salinas Valleys and driving many miles as part of their daily lives. I have no idea whether a good comprehensive planning process would conclude that the railroad through Coyote Valley or other features should be leveraged for dense new housing and other human needs in addition to the recreation, agriculture, and habitat the authors of the July 21 letter recommend. Given the size of the property, I am surprised that the letter does not consider whether the just requests of Native American groups for land in the region cannot be accommodated there.

But those who care most about the environment, nature, and climate change should be leaders in calling for a comprehensive approach to housing in San Jose, Santa Clara County, and the Bay area before removal of the Urban Reserve designation in Coyote Valley is considered.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Wood', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Chapman Wood  
Professor of Strategic Management  
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Institutional affiliation is provided for identification only. The views expressed are the author's.